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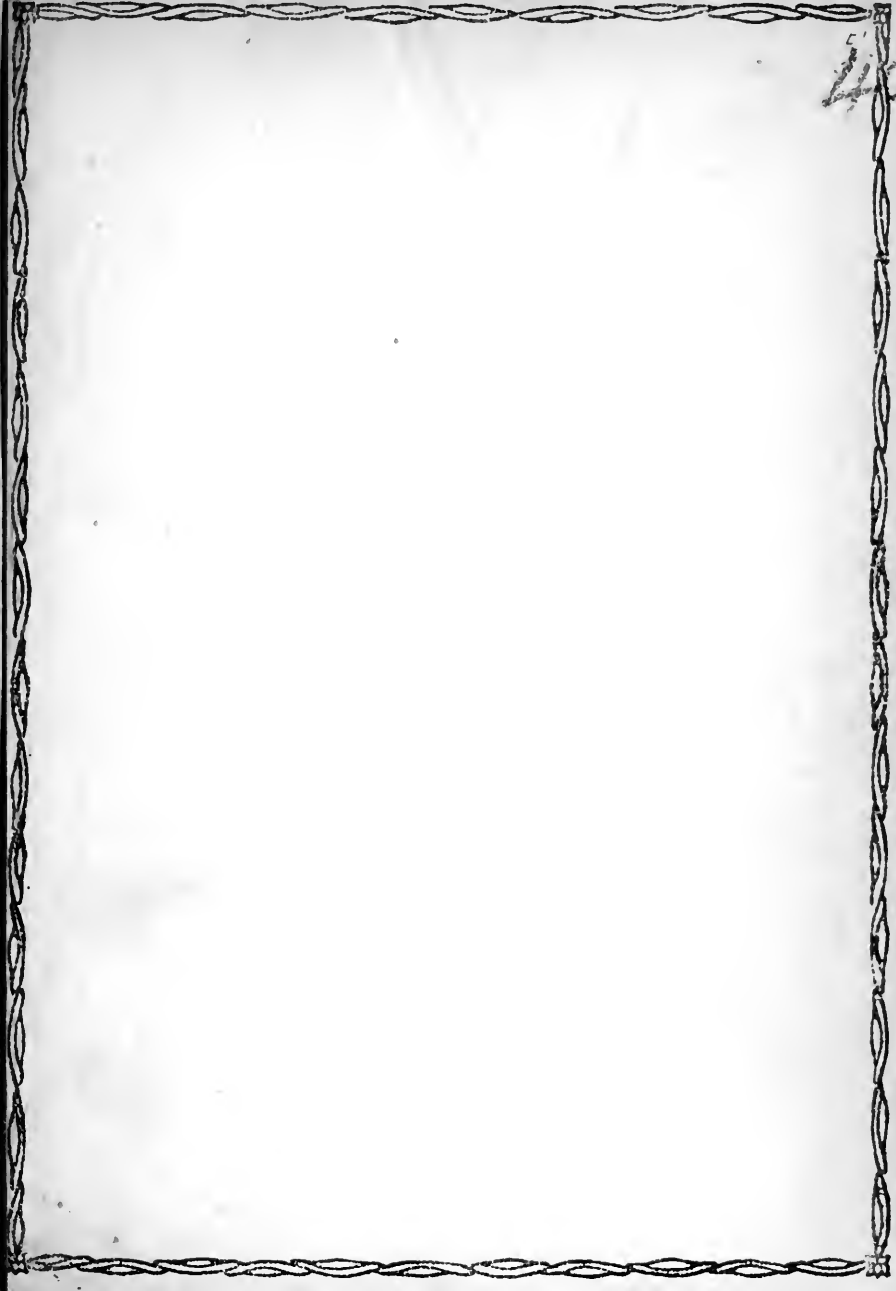
DIVINE DISCONTENT

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JAMES GUTHRIE

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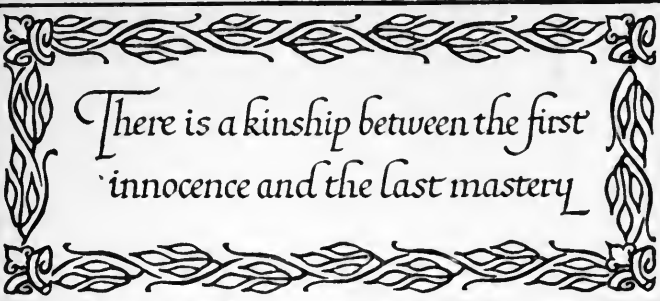
DIVINE DISCONTENT

By James Guthrie



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*There is a kinship between the first
innocence and the last mastery*

I. OF CONTENT

OUR praise of content is too idle. Among arduous days we set up this ideal of rest, our own desires far too tempestuous to let us be at such a haven, and circumstance too busy with our lives. So it is no foolish notion that contentment sets a limit upon meaner ambitions and gives room in the world for nobler. The man who beholds little of life believes there is no more. A child, still radiant with the trail of glory, adventures only upon the path of innocence, snug and content with food and warmth and sleep, securely shut from the hurt (which is knowledge) within his mother's arms. Maybe

I take it on trust from the robin that sings by my window on the bough of an apple-tree ; but, for all his pertness, he is an innocent too and finds contentment without much to-do. His business does not mock at good daylight, he does not go far from home. And unlike that ragged beggar of the streets whose misery makes him sing, the robin sings for gladness, or there is no reason for him to sing at all. Since the Fall we have to regard man's life of experience as a more complicated matter. The time comes when the cloud loses a little its early saturation of glory and takes a greyer light, when the child's heart begins to beat with human passions. Are they right or wrong who hazard that the tragedy of Adam took from mankind a more wondrous life of innocence ? Is the divine law so withdrawn from operation within and around us that we must mourn amid experience the loss of the "contrary state" of innocence ? The danger would be in judging our case from an academic or ecclesiastical proposition, or from

words whose significance is hidden until life itself has ripened in us the wisdom we may read them by. Inspiration, the work of the divine, lies embedded within experience ; it comes unbidden in unlikely places to unlikely persons. It may forsake the monk early upon his knees before the high altar, and uplift the soul of the humble woman who coaxes the kitchen fire to light. It may be radiant in a railway carriage, or fill a wakeful night with vision. We have no guarantee that we shall hold or behold it, if by an intellectual shift we seek to enclose it within the boundary of our wit. By no sort of arithmetic may it be added or divided. Thus, content, the true virtue which fine souls exhale all about them, is a flashing inward light, a genial warmth, a sign of wholeness and fitness ; but we must be particular as to its quality, and not be led astray by that mere dumbness and numbness of faculty, that animal sleep from which the vision is shut. You cannot make content from the absence of cause for discontent. Eat and

drink as you may, you are still hungry, still thirsty. Strange lands and strange faces and many pleasures will still leave you the burden of yourself ; and the task upon your table is not added to, for all your fury of steam and electricity. The strangest of all strange things is yourself to the end. Those are unworthy of our regard who seek contentment by the avoidance of daily vicissitude, holding the law of self-preservation to be the one law which makes for right living. "Children are noisy creatures and spoil the house," say some ; "let us have none of them : for us an orderly place with quiet days and unbroken nights of sleep." These good folk are clean, industrious, virtuous, a pattern to casual passers-by. But their methods are high-handed. They hate a dog, but love a doormat ; they love chairs and curtains better than children ; for their virtue is not discerned through temptation or proved by adversity. They have virtue as though life were emptied of humour and affection to

make room for it. Poised amid the chances of existence, they yet take none, and feel no lack, spending their days dusting and scrubbing, in an eternal preparation for the life which they have no time to live. Others make for themselves a Spartan law against giving and lending, or perhaps they rule hospitality so rigidly for themselves and against their friends that visiting at their house partakes of a fearful discipline, not often to be undertaken. It is all to no purpose : these have not the root of the matter in them : their aim is bad, and their arrows wide of the mark. Where then is true contentment to be found ? There is a pretty parable in one of the school books of a certain king who went among his people, after the old fashion of kings, seeking wisdom. Among princes and nobles he could find no man who was contented ; so, disguised under a cloak of red and gold, with a long blue feather in his cap, he set forth to discover, if he could, a man who was truly contented.

After trying a merchant and a farmer, who proved both to be envious and discontented men, he went to the cottage of an old shepherd and was invited to step in and rest himself. And after partaking of some homely food, he and his host sat upon a bench by the cottage door to talk. Here at length was content, in owning nothing of the world's goods, in having no assurance but in Providence, in an easy mind, plain labour and simple submission to the will of others. In the picture the king's high look is good to see while he sits beside the bent and wrinkled peasant to learn the lesson which does not suffer him to change places, as he would surely need to do if Hans Andersen had told his story. No, he draws the precise moral which he needs, going his way to contentment, but contentment fitting to a king. Being a king of romance, he had no chamberlain who would smooth the rough places in his adventures and do the journey-work of his questing, nor had he lost the comeliness of

manhood in the abstraction of kingship. So the heavenly meaning of the parable goes out beyond its earthly story everywhere ; and the natural schoolboy will return to it, as I do, with thoughts which the pedagogue has not dreamed of. Perhaps it does not recommend the age which we live in to know that what was the text of the romantic tale is now the economist's text. He demands of those who are content with little that they shall consider the claims of their fellows. Indeed the economist will have none of these pageants of grinning poverty miscalled moral emblems. Let us have, says he, a manlier measure, a temper thankful in due proportion to tangible possessions either mental or physical. We cannot dazzle him with our red and gold, bought at the price of bent backs and wrinkled faces. Content has indeed been too often the gift of the rich to the poor ; out of it they have constructed spurious forms of authority and favourable conditions for charitable enterprise. So true is this that one seldom hears

the old formula uttered upon the poor without feeling the force of a strong interrogation. Who created this place wherein the poor man is admonished to remain content? Is any State the better for ill-educated, ill-fed beings? Is any civilization flattered or any religious belief upheld by thankfulness which is the result of repression and tyranny? No, we may adapt the saying of the philosopher and declare the benefits of a poor condition praiseworthy but not enviable. Contentment which is the sign of limited understanding rather than a measure of the goodness of content is a rebuke, a very eloquent rebuke. The rich man is no less foolishly content who suffers his possessions to supplant his manly quality or buy him out of reality. Even the economist himself must beware lest he set too much store upon goods, lest he imagine a vain sort of well-being for those whom he would benefit by his reasonings. The worker has the goodly heritage of skill. He can do things with his hands which no clerk or

manager or politician can know the inwardness of. It is likely that he will never be greatly interested in a villa or a motor-car, which are inferior distractions. The simplicity of men's minds is hard to kill, whatever engine we use upon it, and the primitive state of contentment baffles our endeavours at putting a fence about it. The relation of content is to the varying desires of mankind ; its fullness and profundity are to be measured by the quality of the vessel and its capacity, whether material or spiritual. One may be content with no more than food, content to the measure of hunger's urgency, pleased then to rest drowsily and to have a benign approbation of the world as it is, full and comfortable, prosperous within the range of appetite. Another may find in a competency of this world's goods the top of his bent, the utmost apex of his ambition, sleeping and waking always without fear of the wolf which haunts the poor man's door, able to indulge the pride which cries exultingly

“I owe not any man.” Thus the content which is complete so easily can boast of no divine hunger. Our praise is for men of high desire and great endeavour. In their contentment we see the enterprise extinguished, the loss of a goodly companionship. Retirement, that desperate ideal of the tradesman, is an end of usefulness : the man makes too much haste to die, with ten years yet to live. Those who are of the higher order must needs achieve something ; for they have to be fit as well as desirous, theirs being no easy or enviable place. So mighty a discontent, so yearning an imagination,—where within our rewards is the gift which will reward it and let it rest content ? Cuchulain fought the ocean for two whole days, and then it passed over him ; Oisin sought for three hundred years to appease his insatiable heart with all the pleasures of faeryland. And history is hardly less extraordinary a record of enduring idealism. The common sailor had no notion of the faith which kept Columbus upon his

search for the new world ; for upon his limited mental horizon no enchanted lands dawned. And when at last the swift current swept beneath the great ship's keel telling of inland waters and pouring rivers, he had no power to share in the fierce elation of the master-mind which had designed a continent beforehand and steered a course to it in faith. But there are adventures enough left to us. If you watch the people in the streets of a city, you will see that each one heads, each one follows, a procession ; up one turning and down another, men and women and children go all the day long. They are always changing and dividing, each individual intent upon some errand ; but always leading and always led. To the idle spectator there is no clue to the many impulses which make up this pageantry of every day ; only afterwards the thought will come to him as he walks, that he also leads and follows, and then he will walk with pride, but with humility also. Somehow so we may gather an idea of the wider relevance

of our lives, and be little concerned with content which provides ourselves and takes us away from noble strife among men.

II. OF DIVINE DISCONTENT

☞ WHEREAS material discontent goes to the forwarding of common ambitions, having for success an ideal which is the mark of a passive spiritual condition—mere contentment—the discontent which is divine may well be the name of that critical attitude of the soul towards mortal circumstance and the changes which life effects in the fibre of man's consciousness. It also encloses the selectiveness of a delicately tempered sensibility within its meaning, and gives the thought a wistful entanglement with origins, a plain hint of God actively implanted in the flesh. The strange gift of vision strips away the veils which hide the spiritual life from eyes which have not yet learned to see, and, as if from a great height, discerns the far horizon and the beckoning which allures

and supports through all vicissitudes, and has in it the promise of the eternal. But divine discontent seeks no malign or insufficient comfort from mental false-dealing so acutely spoken of in the words : " They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace ; when there is no peace." The Bible is rich in the language of divine discontent, aiming its heavy blows at false optimism and at comfortings which are rooted in unfaith and pessimism. With many shifts, at many pains, the mind of man searches the recesses of experience for a span of rest which shall not turn into a battlefield. He ransacks the world for pleasure high enough to take from him the fever of his thought, hoping to throw off the inward impulse which pushes him on to more and ever more labour and weariness. Only the labour will reward him ; but yet he often goes in fear of it, striving by every other means for ends which elude him. I have heard one lament that

beside the sea, the scale of a man is too insignificant, desiring some more towering magnificence, some sign of power altogether more god-like. But could we stretch our stature to the height of a house or a hill, our scale would still be inconsiderable, and the sea might still mock at us. Our boundaries would be in no way enlarged, although our necessities would be increased. No, we are better to be higher than the primroses and a little lower than a tree. The giant, like the dwarf, is a vagary, and not to be reckoned upon ; quantity in a man is no guarantee of manfulness. We are prone, indeed, to believe the sign and pass over the wonder ; to imagine more mystery in picturesque appearance than there is warrant for. That gorgeous herald who steps from the darkness of nowhere into the sunshine of the street is not of ordinary design in our eyes. He has hold of us by many an historical tag ; yet when his work is over, he will eat his dinner, and his dinner will be like dinners

which we have eaten. Altogether he is more careless of our raptures than is decent. The poet who wrote those beautiful verses I have newly read to my little daughter sat astride a chair clasping its back when I saw him last ; yet she asks “ Is he not wonderful to look at ? ” and “ He cannot be living now ? ” So are we at play with our admiration, and the things which we can handle familiarly have nothing of the bloom of romance until we are tamed from our wild illusions and shown wonder and beauty at our own fireside. We are the patient wool-gatherers of Fortune, but are loath to look near home for our wool, preferring strange roads and enchanted forests to search in. The homely stuff is too drab, too ready at hand to satisfy us. And circumstance, *that* hinders us also. What we would do is inconvenient to be at. Our great picture, our wonderful book—do not their beauty and complexity haunt us at night when the moonlight is charming the counterpane and

we blink with the glory of it and our own fertile imagining? The work seems all but done. So many days of simple labour with the brush; so many neat pages of foolscap written over,—and then the great rush of praise and astonishment and envy! Indeed, so artfully is the feast spread, so eagerly swallowed, our plan has melted by the morning, our twilight house of labour soon broken by steadily familiar noises. As with children, so with men: the illusion of circumstance is hard to break, difficult to bend or shape to the right pattern. So far as it may be proved to be Divine, we may account it the cause of our helplessness, getting whatever comfort there is in being beaten by so large an adversary. Those who have rebelled against temporal or spiritual authority have accepted circumstance as a man-made product, and for that reason capable of change by force or persuasion. And assuredly that was a romantic day when a man could dispute with one as solid as himself, and block aggression with

his body. At least he did not dress up a difficulty and surround it with a halo of light not its own: he liked to feel dark places with a long sharp spear, and adventure his wit against his enemy's. The lantern of the mystic has often enough failed to show anything but the darkness, his furious religious besom has left us still our cobwebs of poverty and disease. He has not kept faith with us, nor used his powers to aid us. The fanatic also whose eye lights always jealously upon evil, whose good is a precipitate of evil, a kind of waste product, has little to give the world. Of his building we may say that it is good to fall; and of his planting, it is good to drive the plough through. The energy of divine discontent needs to take a short way, and to come at the matter quickly. The tenderness of the worldly towards the worldly marks the institution as the proper point of attack; but reform had better heed etiquette less and take personal grounds. The man beaten

his walls are only so much brick and mortar, a sound refuge from the rain when wisdom is no longer mislaid among its multitude of counsels. When reforms are discussed, our clarity of judgment is lost in a bewilderment of causes ; we whittle down the larger law of humanity and make instead ponderously elaborated ones which take us from the true centre. Politicians and judges are our dark Egyptian plague. For the sake of groups, associations, classes and clubs, we fritter away the nobler inclusiveness of our world of men. We have machinery which serves the dolt, but nothing to preserve genius, when it flowers among us, from mortal harassment. The problem of bread still presses upon mankind after six thousand years ; yet if I have bread because my neighbour has none, it must remain an unpalatable morsel and a shame in the sight of God. If, being well-provided, I lapse into idleness, and become a mere browser where others labour and sweat, it needs no golden text to

tell me of my costly uselessness ; I know without statistics that the bill must be met at one time or another, now or in a generation, to the full, at the price of suffering. Like a tale that has been told many times we know by heart how hard life is to live. Balanced between our spiritual aspiration and the insecurity of mortal circumstance, we are in two minds as to our condition. Entrapped in the disabilities of the flesh, urged on all the while by that same stream of life of which we often seem to be but spectators, allured at one moment, set back at the next, how shall we sufficiently realize ourselves to be agents and forces of the divine ? It is hard to live—how often have we heard it said ! Do not the pulpits all over the land hold up to us the grim lesson of mortality, bidding us be “humble, and mindful of death” ? Seeing it so, how could we but settle with a will into a spiritless tussle with brief life—our niggardly and insufficient portion of eternity ? Such a

savage and heathenish worship of death might well invade and spoil our zest for living interests, did we attend to it or allow ourselves to be jockeyed and hypnotized into that desperate frame of mind ; and, dying daily in a foolish sense, become too ready to believe that happiness might somehow exhale from our faintheartedness and the postponement of our purposes. Men do not easily die, just as they do not easily live ; and as nature makes of physical decay the nucleus of other forms of life, so much more does the spiritual principle deny death. A man may die by inches, as we say ; his powers fade imperceptibly ; but this does not take place without immense resistance. There is remorse to battle with anger, love to light up the darkest day with strange spiritual flickerings. No man is utterly vile, or quite blameworthy. One beginning an evil course has to face the difficulty of the career, and recover from the heavy blows which he invites. The good man has many com-

pensations in the conflict with ill ; but the wicked man must find, on the other hand, that his good is ever in rebellion against destruction—that life is tenacious and will fight from stronghold to stronghold and inch by inch for possession. What abstinence will not do, satiety will attempt ; what satiety does not win over, weariness and sickness may. The man is being fought by enemies whom he knows naught of, all the force of nature's first law being then called into operation. He is the product of the ages, and death shall not steal him easily away, with only his single will to favour the adventure. In our divine discontent we must put away the grisly garnishments and decorations which are the emblem of a decadent imagination. Not false peace, but a sword will match the disposition of the mind. Not teaching that is jaundiced, not laws nor associations so long as they do not extend or preserve the sphere of human usefulness, so long as they limit and have within them

no passion for service. None of these man-made conditions will bear scrutiny ; for the critical spirit implies not merely bias but constructiveness also with reference to a more divine pattern. We are not to be so careful to condemn the deed : a solemn abstraction looms behind its paltry actual counterpart. The unmistakable vision of right things defeats all special-pleading which seeks to divert the attention from wrong conceptions of right. The law or the institution may be what it cares to be, so long as our minds are clear and we are not deceived. There must always remain those who, while seeming to quench the flame with sand, still lead on towards the sun ; those idol-breakers who cannot bear that mankind shall fill its eyes with unbeautiful form, and so must ever break and ever remodel the likeness of the gods. In that high cause man shares the burden of the creational mind. Set in Time and Change, he yet derives from beyond the measure of

Time, and has a fixity which vicissitude can hardly disturb out of its calm. The pulsation of life, the ebb and flow of tides, night and day, the whole rhythmic tune of the Universe, the quick heart-beat responding and corresponding—these are all with reference to the same fixed centre, all evidences of friction and contrariety from which unity, wholeness, harmony are evolved. They are the mills of God.

☞ It is as though the Creator, dreaming in the twilight of Heaven, had paused a little to search the chambers of His mind, and as the divine thought flashed, the Universe with its elaborately interwoven pattern of life unfolded itself to be the test and the revelation. The one thought, the atonement, has to be fashioned from the interaction of two thoughts. Out of twilight is the sun ripened, out of doubt comes faith, by sorrow knowledge. Through the maze of evolution God may be said to test His mind, to resolve His moment of divine discontent. The states

of innocence and experience, the principles of good and evil are both essential to that which they are in reference to, to the fixity they inevitably discover or evolve. Thus calling man from the dust, as He had wrought form from out the elemental chaotic cloud, God made him in His image and put him from the Garden of Contentment into an environment of material things and the fact of experience. Framed and held within tremendous primitive elements, shut in by day and night, the graciousness and gloom of more spacious moods, man is conditioned by the unerring physical law ; but lit also by the light of divine consciousness, the fire which is all life and breath and all unresting intelligence too. Through what obscure forms of evolution mankind has been rehearsed in the divine dream is lost to any reckoning of ours in the sheer scale of Space and Duration. Our little foot-rule by which we measure, our scientific scales for weighing, still leave us the knowledge that the measure runs out on

all sides and that the facts are beyond comprehension. Yet if God's thought glitters as we suppose with this rich enchantment, if the creative effort takes this shape to explore the nooks and crannies of material existence, we being its tools and instruments—if this be a true figure of life's origin, may we not also be seen to pass on the stream of life, and reflect what deeds we do upon another race in some distant star whose dial mirrors our minds among the mists of Space? We may not guess what wars and darkness our treason and unfaith bring to pass. So immense are we when our hands are lifted to grope along the boundaries of this fleshly territory and out into the firmament beyond; yet so insignificant in the knowledge that the sum and extent of one world's deed renders our wilfulness and obedience of identical purport, our good and ill no more than a minute whimsical diversity in the pattern of God's mantle. The moralists have never been able to find a clue to the

varying needs of men ; indeed, while apportioning blame which is naught but the bestowal of a name or a written tally, they have not even discriminated between plain effects and causes. The human mind is far too diverse and delicate to be mended by rebuke if it be no more than rebuke. Thus the law set to punish is incapable of constructive remedy, because the plain rogue, its victim, is not the real offender against the community. The ruffian who looks what he is may be a refreshing survival from a more direct and manful condition than this dull one of taxpayers and rate-collectors and retired colonels ; at least he deceives nobody. What legal or other mode or mind has any right to so arrogant and racial an ascendancy ? The polite fraud of the intellect, the subtle false-dealing of half-truth and mental corruption—these are the spoilers, that go free. Yet the choice of rulers and lawgivers is difficult : to some extent the world must trust to friction, to action and reaction, even if only antagonism

between ambitions and interests, until there is wrought the nobler ideal of service and dis-interest, if this may derive from such unlikely parentage. Our task is at best but a rough-hewing, guided to determine difficult points of conduct by the aggregate of human wisdom named Truth. And let us not despise our little art of life, but make of it this much more than an exercise in a witty learning of how to stand well with men that it shall respond to impulses which inwardly stir us to compass deeds unlike those already hardened and deadened into habit. Or if truly we ought to repudiate mental sagacity with its whole desire to prove the next event by the last, and to stand bargaining for other terms and tools; if this is of the Devil and from darkness, as some declare, then let it be rejected utterly. But in cutting ourselves adrift from the entanglement, we must ask the question plainly, and know how much or how little we lay upon ourselves, adventuring, as we then are compelled to, upon uncharted regions. That

one is not entirely foolish who takes a bold stand upon the human position and elects to carve out a delicate gracious figure ; who of mortal clay fashions a beautiful proportionate living man, and then calls aloud for the high tests of reason and daylight upon the work. Such a vigorous grip of reality is more acceptable than mystic fumblings which serve to betray indecision and unfaith rather than to reveal the power to handle spiritual things. In no sense does a worship of divine ancestry preclude a proper care for tangible human revelation ; it leads the more certainly to an increased interest in man and the study of mankind. Yet in each heresy we picture the destruction of the angelic host, so tremulous are we, so ungenerous to our friend who from divergency of invention we call foe, and at whose discomfiture we are willing to connive. In such a temper the holy warfare of puritanism was launched against the arts, whose activity has survived the utmost, and whose decision to go the way of art, which

is also the way of nature, impels the artist to aim at perfecting one thing and one man at a time, and to let just expression be its own missioner. To him the fitness of his work is of importance first and last. In that is embedded all the lesson he has to teach ; for his mind is incurious as to your conversion. And why should he labour with the indeterminate factors of your mind, or spoil the simple subtle implication of right vision and interpretation? The poet also—do you require the extravagance of Moody and Sankey, like some unpromising propaganda to weigh down and break his delicate emotional spell? It cannot be. Art delights in diversity, it propagates the fine spirit of humanity, and praises life. And in the flesh we cannot but seek to build our House of Life true in point of art, right with the conditions laid upon us. The hard varying grain of circumstance yields the material with which we are at leave to build heroically if we will; yet must we be eager to require relevance in our undertakings and

not account loss so bitterly. The stakes are not well laid for a merely tolerable existence and a dislocated diligence. By no means shall we consent to sell ourselves cheaply, nor shall our wives or children be, by consent or repute, the instrument of our confusion. It is too precarious a livelihood which imperils the soul or stays it at gentility. "I who am young," says one, "must first know my own task ere I can promise diligence in it. At the beginning your inducements, your decorations and pensions have little charm for me. Let me make my desire otherwise in service, my reward in happiness." May we claim so great a prize? Life is compared to a lottery; but how much more like a lottery it is as recommended by some! We are admonished to make haste, and be in time; the prizes are guaranteed by government statute; there are few blanks. Everywhere are we bidden to know that ours is a duty of no especial consequence, mere pawns, mere worms as we are! What our virtue, what our pence, in so large a

cast ? The lottery-mongers are in the saddle—for us the chances of the sport, the toilsome wayfaring ; for them the power, the safe assurance. We hardly dream, so great is the charm of this noble plan, that in fact we need no official to direct the business at all. Our belief is altogether better : let him who must for his soul's ripening think ill ; but for us the glittering humour of a day in the world. We will take no sides against it. Do we not, indeed, press forward the claims of Heaven so soon as it overflows the earth, ill-content to sit recording events in a dull style ? The clash and friction are fiercest when our talk is of influence : men hate the re-birth which we insist upon, and afterwards feeling the glow of the healing touch which has cured their contentment, they will soon leave their sick-bed and come into the open and turn the aureate earth with a strong hand and an earnest heart. Happy then is he in our company, being content in the place in which he is not, too careful of divine processes, that

light and excite, to value greatly the trumpery of material possession whose squareness and weight prove its worth the more substantially unimportant. Divine discontent is no passive virtue, hardly heeding the things which are praiseworthy, since it has happiness sown in with it. Exultingly we cry "The work is finished," but in secret we mourn the loss of it. Again we bend to laborious days and suffer the hot tide of mental effort to pass over us. We are tormented, and no task, however easy it looks at the beginning, lets us off one iota; yet filled to the brim with rich surmise, all our faculties aroused, we go among men with the light upon our faces like the prophets of old who, on steep crags which pierced the heavens, communed with God. Gifted with divine discontent, we have ever an urgent call to be on with the story, to reach further, voyage longer, search deeper; and, more, to have capacity for failure and fatigue. In the presence of anger, the contented man avails little, because he has

too long been attuned to pleasing scenes, and courage has been stolen out of his bones: he cannot be debonair; his spirit has no swiftness or vehemence when there is the need. The life of one is always strange to another, however; none are to the full what we think. I remember wondering as a child whether all the houses were like the one in which I lived, and if the orderly procession of duties, of breakfast and dinner and tea, was the same all along the street and in the mysterious detached houses also whose superior gables and greenhouses seemed to depart rather arrogantly from the prevailing custom of the neighbourhood. On the whole I was inclined to favour the idea that behind some of those doors far more wonderful things happened than even the happiest of our own: learning easier got, music not ended so soon, love and riches always renewed with daily surprise. And these I still determine as of the nature of heaven. The advantageous thing still shapes the divine, when seen with the clear eyes of

a child. Popular philosophy imagines man as though he were of straw, and life fixed either at the point of dismal failure or at glittering success, to be lost straightway or gained over at a stroke. The youth therefore, not having been taught to require spiritual embodiment, and still perhaps a little held by the conception of remote Belief, is apt to fall early into despair of ever reconciling what he divines and what he sees. Having taken a heroic pattern to heart, he soon accounts it true that the propitious time is not yet. It may be his likeness to the antique hero is a little flimsy and unfinished, and the rough manners of the world not entirely to blame for flinging pellets at it. Perhaps the youth depends too much upon the mastery of the original, and too little upon his own individual artistry : whatever the reason, the hero-worshipper is not identical with the hero in mind or work ; for admiration has to flatter by labour, imitation grow into spiritual emulation. Where did the man hear so evil a report of the world that he

must set himself in a place apart ? If from his divine self, it has been only partially posted up in the news. Nevertheless he is favoured, and his cause advanced by all men ; his golden nimbus finds reflection in their hearts, and it is as true to-day as ever to say that the uplifting of one soul will draw all men. The world is yet a hard nursery full of complicated toys and noisy distractions. We are by turns the man we despised, so learning by no mere disparagement to attain mastery of our own share of the perfect gifts. For the making of a fine nature is not by the means that we guess. In youth we love the solitary pedestal, the memorial of our preconceived ideas, and shiver for the preservation of our own ascendancy most of all. And perchance we have got to let it all go and to stand the strain of having nothing but the stars and the sea and the deep places, a realm of infinite mysterious fortune. Excellence in our craft requires the utmost beauty of our soul, the real fitness for manful life and effort. Be sure

one who is unfit for life is not fit for immortality. The art of living is an applied art in which our learning will hinder as greatly as it helps. We forsake one precedent only to find that some one has been before us and we are at another unknowingly. Thus are we vexed, but march onwards leaving maybe a deal of baggage littered along the road to be a biddance to others who travel after. To be right with a high conception of reality, we must go with the stubborn gaiety of the artist ; and, like as not, we are hardly recommended by a display of the familiar acceptable virtues. A ship is designed to live upon the waters ; but an architect of ships is not free to reckon without the storm in his calculation of resistance and buoyancy. So we may not hazard a graceful theory of fair weather which the first blast would overturn : our spirit must penetrate the fact and light it with still unvexed faith. Every road does not wind the same way to the forest and the hill, but where lonely paths intersect among the

prickly gorse, and the high roads cross upon the plain, we meet our fellow-travellers and have hail and farewell. And presently that old burden, shouldered unwillingly at the inn, weighs not so heavily, because we have grown to the knowledge that the errand upon which we are sent far exceeds our first dream of industry as bridging the space between need and reward ; that in fact our toil goes less to gain which we shall be able to spend in fine linen or ornament, and more to the making of a man whose bravery supersedes every such outward vanity. Being fit, we shall use all these, perhaps ; but no longer to the end that our shortcomings are hidden and glossed over, no more as make-weight for gaiety which is not true to the temper of our minds. The assemblage of qualities most admirable to us go to the making of the man who is our pattern and ideal. Him we hold in regard and remember even when the mirror is put away and we forget what manner of men we are in the flesh, perceiving, though

dimly enough, the divine corresponding likeness of our earthly being. The world also is created newly each time that we see beyond its pain and complexity, and becomes radiant with the aura of exceeding life, a land flowing with milk and honey, a plenty of spiritual grace poured out. Each morning is the gift of a new day which it were shame to break with anger ; and if with simple hearts, like the hearts of children, we people the night part with beings more timid than our daytime selves, part with creatures of dark moth-like habit whose call and touch upon our sense are fearful and strange and beautiful beyond forsaking, that holds us also, a little awed by its magnificent serenity, moved by the thought that we must lie prone in the keeping of Him who sleeps not. Age does not see with the same eyes as the youth still in the trail of cloud and glory ; it is accustomed, has patience. But if age has not let slip the light and dulled its heat to a brittle grey ash, itself but a burnt-out trace of a fire that once

warmed and cheered, it is to be likened to no consuming restless youth ; for it is as tried gold which will buy us wisdom's pearl. Certain old country-folk there are whom I have seen whose faces are sweet beyond words, certain old fishermen too whose eyes are full of that same wonder which children wake with, having taken from beyond the sea's far rim the colour of the same dream. But oftenest, thinking of age, do I visit a small house which is a good half-day's journey from here, and blame whatsoever business it may be which takes me within reach of it and yet forbids the little more which would find me safely there. Sometimes the church-bells reproach me a little when mother and daughter go out and leave me alone among the carved and painted trophies from many lands which fill the rooms. These I look at rather sadly, wondering at the stillness which is in this house, and will one day be in mine, after the children are grown and gone away. Perhaps they go to seek peace itself, and it is

here in their absence. Who knows what treasure it was that they went in search of, when they cannot tell the secret themselves? The passing stranger will not heed this house: it is hidden enough from curious eyes by being like its fellows; yet within it are these relics, this drift of restless lives. And here is the mother and the daughter who ministers joyfully to her at all times, and here also, pervading the stillness, soothing and hushing all regret and pain, softening every sorrow and anxiety, is the peace which passeth understanding.

Æ It may be that we turn to age for something of the contemplative part to still us and stay us, for fixity of purpose, moral resolution. However that may be, it is sure that to youth we turn also to pick up the golden threads we have lost on the way. Who is there who does not sometimes fold back the veil and disclose the enchanted daybreak of love, or the first promise of achievement? Who has not beheld the massy

gloom of ill-fortune melt before a luminous moment when the effort of youth linked itself to more mature thought and quickened the pulse with livelier energy and more impetuous desire? So at least may we reach and stoop, and always gather for the present new uses from things past and states to come.

¶ A merchant who had been successful and was spending the remaining years of his life in leisure desired his sons to seek his advice in all perplexing matters ; for, said he : “ I have passed through them, and shall be able to advise you so well that you need fall into no errors such as I have fallen and without me you must fall into. Be attentive to my counsel, and more speedily than I you shall gain success and be in honour and repute. The vexations, delays, and losses which have hindered and perplexed me need be of no hurt to you, since you may so readily escape them.” Against such friendly fathering, however, many enemies are ranged. The battle is to the strong, at whose side and in whose

service youth is enrolled. The battle for the strong and the strong for it, and men not to be reckoned upon so readily, nor led so tamely. If youth could indeed be so guided, a textbook would suffice to stay us, and provide everyone a competency. And thus shuffled out of harm's way, the complacency of the world would cry aloud for a strong man of blood, or hatred, or discontent mighty enough to break the drowsy spell. Youth with wiser carelessness throws down its life and the world as a stake; action exhilarates it, each new difficulty meeting with deeper breathing and yet more powerfully strung effort. To youth the time has not come when with duller sense the man feels for ways of escape, having failed and lost heart. No gift, moreover, can have in it either the discipline or the charm of what is the due and the shining prize of a noble and courageous soldier. Content is only won through discontent; ease of mind and leisure for the body are not to be handed like a packet across the table. Each new generation,

also, has its peculiar fund of inspiration, and in that regard history can teach no lesson which is not already in full view within the span of one thoughtful mind. We shape to a man, but what we do reacts upon the world; we are poor, but powerful also, and must either sink in the one sort or rise in the other. A too complicated care for opinion in one eager to test himself against society may invite much of the barbarity and savagery of primitive cruelty; but it remains true also that the wheels and cogs need not engage us. If the world can provide us with our best, be sure it has the power to oppose our best and frustrate it or whittle it away harmlessly if it so wish. Yet to the young man who comes with too many poetic observations I say : “I care not what skyey mansions your ideals decorate if they are of no use to daily life in the workshop, in the lane, in the counting-house. Were it truly an ideal which you would show us, go and with skilful hand carve it ethereally in material substance.

Master the verse, the chisel, the pen; give to your spiritual part the fine integrity of the material; build the bridge which will let mankind share with you the vision you boast of." One of the would-be founders of a new ascetic heroic system spoke of it to a certain great fellow whose support he was soliciting, whereupon he was asked the question: "But why, if you prohibit the smoking of tobacco, are your own fingers stained with nicotine?" Need I say that his reply: "Oh, we have not begun yet" completely shattered the fragile illusion, and rendered his errand as fruitless as afterwards the whole cult proved to be? No, we require a greater valour to invite our interest and call us out of our present habit; the sparkling heady wine must not turn into ditchwater so soon as we prepare to drink of it. The "common day" starts early with tremendous meanings around us, so widely spread as it is over the earth. We find ourselves lifted in our own conceit by the subtle comparison. With hardly an effort the whole

horizon is ours, and conquest easy enough to be idly recommended elsewhere. And some will argue it the more prosaic than ever it was, as though predestined to defeat every noble aspiration ; we and the world both villainous of necessity, by some fate beyond our mending bequeathed to sin and ruin. But I set myself against the report, and if upon that reckoning any sort of belief is founded, put it from my mind without a qualm ; for the claims which it will make can be no sounder than the dismal heresy upon which it is built. As with evil, so with good, men hypnotize themselves. They hide from their sight all save those things which are to their standard of good and thus turn a counterfeit complacency uppermost, to the end that they be not shocked or put-about by appearances not within their philosophy. Some one has written : "The Author of Creation is the only author who is supposed to be flattered by disparagement of his works." Set a light to naphtha, and it will burn and maybe fire a

house or a ship ; let loose the waters and they will spoil ; infect with disease, and it will act after the manner of its sort and no other. The price of knowledge is heavy, but the law remains and must remain if the day is to succeed the night and reason stay within mankind. Watch the shadow cast upon the wall by a projecting moulding, by a picture-frame or a lintel-post : it is true to the angle of the light, to every curve and variation of form. A flicker of firelight from another direction will fight to make its light and its shadow, tempering the stronger shadow exactly according to its force and colour. For a moment there is the hint of a new figure, and as the flame dies, the mastering light mends its work. It is all logical and accountable, consummately precise and tireless, and is a source of exceeding joy to those who nurse no desire for law less absolute and inscrutable, but rather, able in little matters to trace its operation, find in it always more and more rapture and excitement. To what we know,

we add what we can divine of the unknown in order to find worthy beliefs, or else, existing in despite of the bodying element, we praise the soul and despise the body, and by so much forbid the dream to cross the gulf. The dream and the deed, as over a gulf, beckon and correspond ; spirit and body utterly friendly and interchangeable, and perception and sensation with no news that wars against our praise of the God who made our beautiful orderly bodies and who set us in this enchanted land. That one attends no less to vision who is scrupulous of the material in which he works, knowing that mastery lies first in obedience, and service rests with understanding. For him no vain bias against solid material and hard fact—does not his soul reappear shiningly in these when he has made them his servants? The presence of the spiritual is not, on the other hand, shown forth by the failure of tangible expression ; piety affecting to address the world in terms already within knowledge, with no command

of the language to forward it, is not merely materially incompetent, but spiritually incompetent. Writing of this I have especially in mind certain psychic pictures which are supposed to suggest important wanderings of the human consciousness ; but there are many people who bear ill-done testimony to beliefs which jut out far beyond their grasp of form into unpleasant chaotic darkness. It is, of course, an elementary fact that command of form is more arduously gotten than are the thoughts which remain locked within the mind, groping, as it were, for a way of escape into other friendly minds, for the book, the marble, the music—whichever of these is best fitting.

☞ In what manner shall a theory of education be stated which will drive us past our discontent at a proper pace, and set us free without the encumberment of so much that is stated but not related ? The study of existing complications is of no interest to our natural condition. We juggle with

memory, and although we may say of the mass and bulk of books : "This also Life ; memorial to forgetfulness"—the real substance of education is at first hand, and that which we learn when we play truant of most value to us. Books of information exhale a musty aroma very early, like mouldy grain kept too long in the granary. We prepare to live, are always anxious on a lower plane than our true one. At least we believe our ideals are sanitary ; if we are uncomfortable and hedged about with cleanliness, we are safe in our worship of rudimentary functions. Mere lacing and buttoning eat up our days. There is no praise in the struggle : virtue is hardly rewarded for so much trouble ; for, intent upon a creed or an elaboration of etiquette, we create new vices so that there may be more and yet more delicate shades of virtue. Can we by no effort cleanse and wash away the past once and-for all, or set apart a day in each year on which to bathe and anoint

and re-create ourselves, beginning a new year, being ourselves renewed ? The scholar, childlike and bland though he be, has settled firmly upon the world of men. In an awed voice he reads us the lesson from the past. The poet, hearing, writes ; but it is of Helen of Troy, and our delight is tempered always because we must buy and read books which are already dead of many tortures. The painter, hearing, paints Venus, shall we say, torturing his unlettered mind at the story. The architect, hearing, designs another Gothic church ; for is it not true that although we are not Gothic, the Gothic is most praiseworthy ? And so the musician with Brünnhilde or another ; and so everybody who is in need of a tag or an opiate. To-day my newspaper contains sagacious views upon the Universities as a training-ground for men of business. Perhaps the City will swallow up the scholar ; at least I am comforted in the thought that the scholar must be eased from his present situa-

tion, or our mood mended. We see Time in perspective, are long-sighted. The beauty of this hour and place we *will* not see till the inessential mortal part has sunk away and we are able to focus justly our present fortunes. Hurt, we have forgotten long ago the circumstance of it, but go a little halt ; battered, we take it for granted. In another obliviousness goes a man in a mist : as he walks the place changes ; he witnesses the ripening of new gables and windows from nothingness, the gradual emergence of trees ; then they all float past and he can only dimly see the road upon which he treads and guess at what new shape will float within his mysterious walls. Of such is the daily life of very simple people, who tend sheep, thatch stacks—who live in the present ; rather humbly, rather dumbly, live. Perhaps the pageantry of life is theirs more than ours, after all 's said, and their content deeper-rooted than we think it. Whatever be the truth in this matter, so long as we can gain

no more from learning than paltry authority and the manners of slaves and copyists, we are not getting our due, and the subsidy paid to the scholar has resulted in the loss of his services to the rest of mankind. We plan and scheme for mediocrity, and have hardly an opinion which we must not put within inverted commas. Worship if you will at the feet of the ancients ; let a glaze float over your eye when you name tremendous names and things, if you are bold enough to venture at all where every bookworm has your quotation pat from his lesson-book and waits to trip you up. Life grown professorial is still-life : we are stifled with text-books, with worn-out admirations and ready-made romance ; we are suspended and put by ; we lack the swift vivid flame of faith, the sense of mirth which fills a night of pain with ecstasy because of the sheer beauty of the dim moonlight, the dawn, and the awakening world. The young artist yearns with a mighty sense of the eternal pastoral. He sees

in it a permanent theme, a vantage-ground from which he may view eternal and passing things. But men are busy with art as if it were an entertainment for the rich, to be crowned or rejected, to be accelerated or hindered at the whim of patronage or by the judgment of a journalist or professor of Taste. None dream that the high heritage of art is in the blood, in the heart, and that if it is not living it is dead. Without a view of the present, we are lost to a sense of locality. What is French, or Dutch, or Chinese interests us more than our own product ; but if it be spread out thinly enough we love a parade of patriotism. Loving all men collectively, we love no one man in particular : to love our neighbour is impossible ; he is too near to us. We forget that personal fitness is the first and last of patriotism, the end of oppression and all selfish evils. But the present is built into the foreground, and we rove elsewhere. Men's brows are heavy with "affairs" of State and business ; nevertheless the Bill

is ill-drawn, the business commonplace, as may be seen by all. It is a sham, a pretentious sham. A man of real girth of soul will lift the common task to the height of inspiration; everything he does becomes magnificent and suggestive and uplifting, and he himself a force of nature like buoyant sea and air. Life has to be informed with greater things, our room be measured by our sense of the firmament. We are set in obedience, not that we may fail; but fitly caused, contained and continued. We are, in reference to wonders which move outside us, drawn as the tides of the sea by mysterious and powerful pulsation. Thus in commerce is the idea of providing, not profit. In the arts, praise of life is the root-cause which must inform the work through and through till it grows lyrical—the rest may be safely left. The poet must fill the land with song, and leave the matter of encouragement within the first fact. In love we must attend to love, the divine IT which with the two lovers forms the Trinity. She

greedy for herself, he greedy for himself, desiring admiration, praise, comfort from love, is in the wrong : the joined regard of Love's hovering spirit is the true unity and godhead of love. For low contentment, interest will do ; but in the higher sort disinterest solves at length all the problem. And taking that lofty selflessness for ours it will be easy to resist those invitations which are laid as a net to catch our unwary desires. The gain to be made from mere temporizing and extemporizing, politic, prudent steps which provide a living but first rob us of the centre and fount of our life—these must be slung back with vehemence, used as a weapon of assault. Utter consistency is not yet to be found ; yet we may earn much by frankness, being loyal this much to the truth that we preserve a gentle heart towards our fellows and our word as our bond. When the cleric bids us reverence his calling and his Church, let us be sure that if that reverence has no root within us, its flower is vainly commanded. The Church has to

include us before we are included : it exists for us, not we for it. The balanced consciousness accepts no flimsy reasons, it penetrates all disguises and comes at the truth which lurks behind them. Suppositions and premises are as a hand waving before a face : we see the face more than the hand all the while. If we are not strong by strength, we shall not be so by a display of sweating energy. Again, I am unlike you, and you unlike me ; our faces do not resemble each other except in the broad generic sense, our bones do not exactly tally : still consciousness is a single principle through all diversity of image. It is not easier for me to take my way than for you to take yours. I may not be indifferent to that which you are indifferent to, at my soul's peril. If you desire to thwart my will, or I your will, it gives no promise of safety, however liberally inclined each of us may be. The mind in us is the same divine mind, but its shape and purport are different. We sow variously, you and I, for the world's good and to God's praise. In

the beginning talent no larger than a man's hand, things lightly held. Afterwards character, the gritty substance of us making daily demands. We are vehicles of life, even in repose sending out rays and currents of force. An ancient Irish saying has it that "God possesses the heavens, but He covets the earth." And our desire is one with that. The task is never done with. Youth finds the work of age has left much undone, unprovided ; but again youth grows to age, and the tools are never idle one generation to another. We are ripened, but know not the process, being preserved by one blindness, one vision. For me others bear experience which my life could not else hold. Others tell to me my own thoughts and keep some unspoken ; but not all my thoughts—the rest are mine to tell. Nature provides for food and for seed also, in man as in corn. Variety and contrariety set up the spark which sets the world on fire, and no gain would be in causing mankind to be melted and poured into uniformity

and conformity. The design is already inclusive enough, exclusive enough, before we have our club and lodge ; the association of minds is here, the convivial party already formed in the concourse of people. Manners also began before Manners were invented. The mother of false etiquette is tact, the father self-interest. I am long about it ; but for me at least it is true that this place of mine is my place, and life with its numberless shifts and adjustments and glories, an excitement and a pleasure too, and not the less so for the part I play in it willingly and with my whole heart. If the glory of the day, or my glory, is not astonishing always, I shall not disparage the age on that account : the spread feast and the high lamps I shall seek, or go by sea or remote footpath as gaily, prepared ever to stay and depart. In what scene or event my needful salvation lurks, I cannot tell : it is no hysterical anxiety now. The reasons which aim to convert me must be excellent ones ; I have stored so many early symptoms away by

now, and am particular what belief I take. For now I cannot choose but choose my friends for the whole time. My father's own son, my dear early companion, may be my brother indeed ; but who knows ?—perhaps we are carried apart, and I derive strange new brotherhood elsewhere and he has met one he loves better. The reckoning is not to my bill : the love I seek turns away her sad face ; where I was careless, steadfastness declares itself upon my side. North becomes South, the East exchanges with the West, and whence dolour was promised, joy runs out to meet me and presses my hands and kisses my lips.

☞ He only can be content who has first known discontent, for then does it greatly please, like “rest after toil and port after stormy seas.” We are changed by devious ways, and charged with more than we know, and cannot guess our own discontent, good and ill fortune requiring our fullness when we are prone to hold the sum of life lightly.

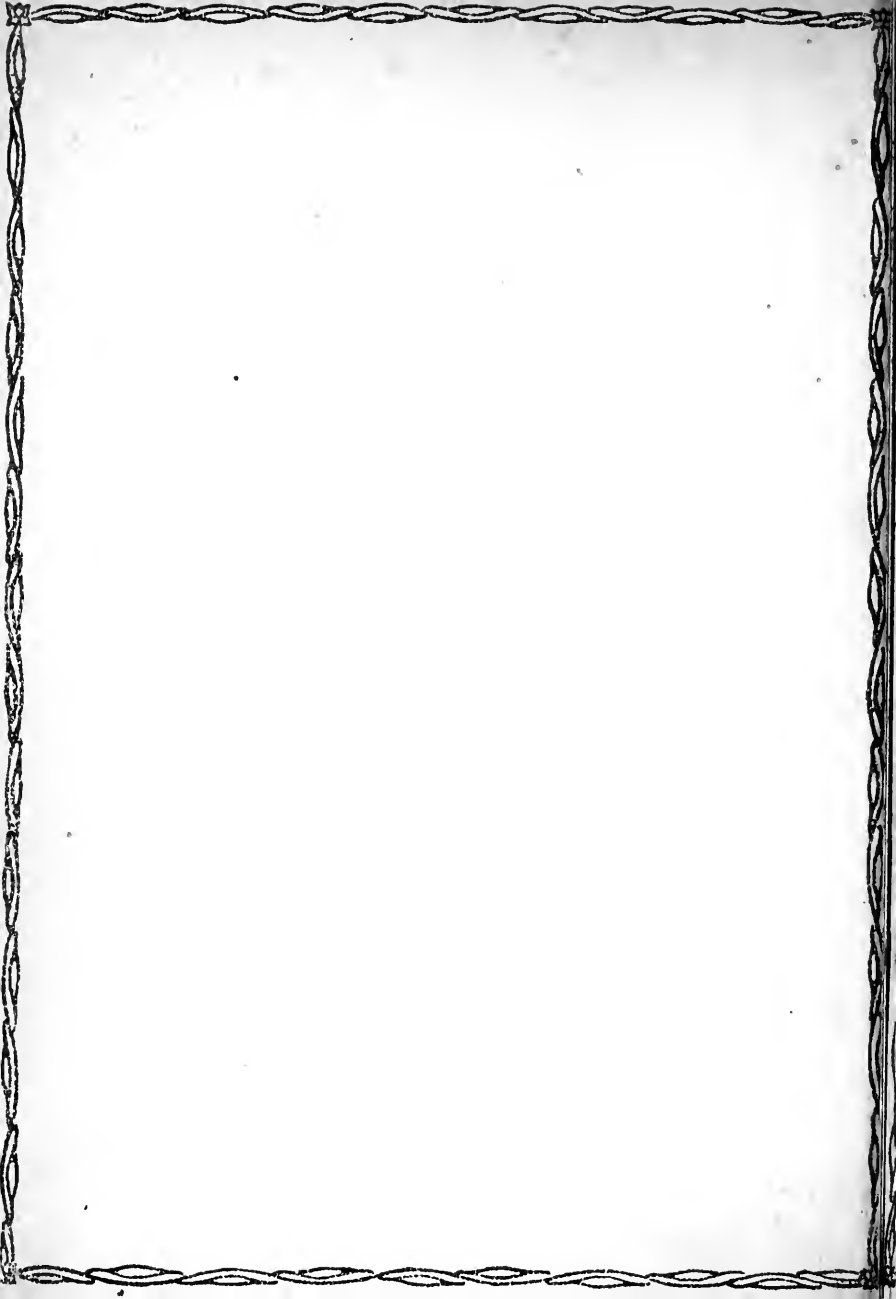
By nature we lean upon content, and press on through labour, allured by the picture of repose which we have made for ourselves. Poor, we imagine in riches ease far beyond the power of riches to buy ; troubled, we look for an end to adversity, ever in the thought of that heaven in whose benign serenity our weary bodies will revive and our burdening anxieties be laid down. Nor is it ours to guess how we shall be preserved, thus willingly shedding all that which stills preserves us through many vicissitudes ; for we are persuaded that our divine discontent is well-founded, and that in its course divine content is revealed. But if we go in fear of the over-shadowing cloud and energy of circumstance, and care more for good which is easily within the span of our imaginations, we are still in the need to be in the gripe of affairs. To be contented with content which is the negation of endeavour, has no longer in it the assurance of virtue in the regards of men. It is better to say ; “ I am

secure ; I pass from one insecurity to another.
My mind no longer slips upon the green
weed : doubt is a spectacle, in whose shadow
I shall yet win the vision and discover the
disposition of the divine."



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